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The following is an excerpt from an article in the February, 1980, issue of Cosmopolitan Magazine:

immediately read up on the subject and subsequently got in touch with Robert A. Monroe, a Virginia businessperson who has had hundreds of such experiences himself, some of which he describes in a mind-boggling book called *Journeys Out of the Body*. Monroe has a laboratory in Virginia where he does out-of-body research, which includes experimentation with teaching people how to have out-of-body experiences on command. Elisabeth wanted very much to learn this so that she might better understand the experiences of her patients, so she went to visit Monroe and succeeded without difficulty in mastering his techniques.

Her account of where this led her began to flow in a nonstop stream of words that she constantly described as inadequate to communicate the truth of what happened. I sat spellbound as she recreated for me a remarkable experience that she seems herself to view with a combination of matter-of-factness and a still-lingering sense of amazement and awe. She touched my arm often as she spoke, as if to make sure that I was still "with her" on her journey:

"When I decide to do something, I do it wholeheartedly, and one great asset I have is that I am not afraid of anything—or almost anything. But Bob Monroe didn't know that; so when I had my first experiment I went too fast, and he interfered when I was just at the ceiling. He called me, and I went 'kerplunk' back into my body. I was mad as could be. It was the first time I was able to do it on command, and it was a big thrill that it actually worked. I was like an excited child, but just as I was getting to the ceiling, boom. So the next time, I thought, 'I'm going to beat him to it. I am going so far that he can't catch me.' That's in our language, which in an out-of-body thing doesn't exist.

"So the moment we started, I said to myself, 'I am going so fast that nobody has ever gone that fast, and I am going further than anybody has ever gone.' And at that moment when I said that, I took off faster than the speed of light. I felt like I must have gone a million miles, in my language. But I was going horizontal instead of up. You understand that in an out-of-body experience there is no space and no time, but you are so conditioned in your thinking that you think you have to go up or otherwise you will hit a wall or something. The moment I realized I was going at the speed of light horizontally, I switched and made a right-angle turn, rounded a big hill and went up. And then I started to experiment. It is incredible to get to a place where there is no time and space.

"It was an important voyage, and I had a super time. I was in total, absolute, completest silence, and I was thrilled about experiencing this. And I went to a place so far that when I came back, something very incredible happened. I felt like a beaming source of light is the best description I can give you. I felt like a source of light that could illuminate the darkest corner of the world—I can't describe it any other way.

"When I walked out of the laboratory, everybody stared at me and asked what had happened, but I had no recollection—I could not remember or tell them where I was. All I knew was that something so absolutely incredible had happened to me that it was beyond description. All I could remember was the word *Shanti Nilaya*, and nobody there knew what that meant. They tried every gimmick to get me to remember, but nothing worked—I know now it was because I didn't want to share it yet. It was too sacred to share with a bunch of strangers.

"That night the sleeping arrangements where I was were such that I ended up sleeping alone in a very isolated guest house, and I was in a questioning sort of conflict, feeling that should I actually go to sleep there, something horrendous would happen. I thought of taking a room in a motel and asking to be in the presence of other human beings, but at the moment I contemplated my alternatives, I knew that I had gone too far and could not back out. I had to finish up what I had started—that's all I knew at the moment. So I went into that house, and I knew the imminence of something horrendous—not horrible, but horrendous—that something horrendous would happen. I couldn't sleep, and I couldn't stay awake. I wanted to sleep to avoid it, but I knew at the same time that I could not avoid it.

"And then I had one of the most incredible experiences of my life. In one sentence: I went through every single death of every single one of my thousand patients. And I mean the physical pain, the dyspnea [labored breathing], the agony, the screaming for help. The pain was beyond any description. There was no time to think and no time for anything except that twice I caught a breath, like between two labor pains, I was able to catch my breath like for a split second, and I pleaded, I guess, with God for a shoulder to lean on, for one human shoulder, and I visualized a man's shoulder that I could put my head on. And a thunderous voice came: 'You shall not be given.' Those words. And then I went back to my agony and pain and dyspnea and doubling up in the bed. But I was awake. I mean, it wasn't a dream. I was

reliving every single death of every one of my dying patients—and every aspect of it, not just the physical.

"Then about an eternity later, I begged for a hand to hold. My fantasy was that a hand would come up on the right side of the bed and I could hold it. And then again this voice: 'You shall not be given.' Then you know, there was the whole self-pity trip I went through: 'I've held so many hands, and yet I am not to have even one hand in my own hour of agony—that whole thing. [She laughs.] I didn't have time to think of all this, but it was all part of the agony. Then for a moment I contemplated whether I should ask for a fingertip—a fingertip I couldn't hold on to, but at least I would know about the presence of another human being. But typically me, I said, 'Dammit, no. If I can't get one hand, I don't want a fingertip either.' That was my final outpouring of rage and indignity at God or whoever, that I didn't want a fingertip if I couldn't have a hand. It was something like anger or defiance, but also the realization that in the ultimate agony you have to do it alone—nobody can do it for you.

"Once I realized this, I said in almost a challenging way—and again this is not in words but in experience—"Okay. Give it to me. Whatever it is that I have to take, I am ready to take it." I guess by then the agony and pain—and this went on for hours—were so great that 10,000 more deaths wouldn't have made any difference, since all the pain you could endure was already there anyway. But the second I said yes to it and really meant it from the bottom of my heart, the moment I felt the confidence that I could actually take whatever came, all the dyspnea, hemorrhage, pain, and agony disappeared in one split second, and out of it came the most incredible rebirth experience.

"It was so beautiful there are no words to describe it. It started as my belly wall vibrating, and I looked—this was full, open eyes, fully conscious—and I said, 'This can't be.' I mean, anatomically, physiologically, it was not possible. It vibrated very fast. And then everywhere I looked in the room—my legs, the closet, the window—everything started to vibrate into a million molecules. Everything vibrated at this incredible speed. And in front of me was a form. The closest way to describe it is like a vagina. I looked at that, and as I focused on it, it turned into a lotus-flower bud. And while I watched this in utter amazement—there were incredibly beautiful colors and smells and sounds in the room—it opened up into the most beautiful lotus flower. And behind it was like a sunrise, the brightest light you can imagine without hurting your eyes. And as the flower opened, its absolute fullness in this life was totally present. At that moment the light was full and open, like the whole sun was there, and the flower was full and open. The vibrations stopped, and the million molecules, including me—it was all part of the world—fell into one piece. It was like a million pieces fell into one, and I was part of that one. And I finally thought, 'I'm okay, because I'm part of all this.'

"I know that's a crazy description for anybody who has not experienced this. It is the closest I can share it with you. It was so incredibly beautiful that if I would describe it as a thousand orgasms at one time it would be a very shabby comparison. There are no words for it, really. We have very inadequate language.

"And then the next morning as I walked outside it was incredible, because I was in love with every leaf, every tree, every bird—even the pebbles. I know I didn't walk on the

pebbles but a little above them. And I kept saying to the pebbles, 'I can't step on you because I can't hurt you.' They were alive as I was, and I was part of this whole alive universe. It took me months to be able to describe all this in any halfway adequate words.

"And then somebody told me that this was an experience of cosmic consciousness. I have had many experiences like this since, always spontaneously when I least expect them. But I have the experience first, the mystical experience, and then I have to read up on what the heck it is, because I don't read things like this or have time to study them. In a way I am fortunate to have the experience and then catch up in my head afterward.

"But *Shanti Nilaya* means the 'home of peace,' which is where we all end up one day when we have gone through all the hell and all the agonies that life brings and have been able to accept it. This is the reward for all the pain and agony that people have to go through."

Wonderful but Weird

By the time Elisabeth finished this story, we were the only ones left in the cafeteria. "Is it one o'clock?" she asked, and the answer was generally acknowledged. Charles L. Hart, a psychology professor who wrote the introduction to Monroe's *Journeys Out of the Body*, considers out-of-body experiences (OBEs) to be "a universal human experience" in that they have happened throughout recorded history with little variation in the descriptions of the basic event. "One can find reports of OBEs by housewives in Kansas," he writes, "which closely resemble accounts of OBEs from ancient Egyptian or oriental sources." (A wide-ranging survey of cases on record can be found in Herbert B. Greenhouse's *The Astral Journey*.)

Although a mystical rebirth or "cosmic consciousness" experience such as Elisabeth's certainly does not accompany or follow as a standard part of the typical OBE, it has been found that people who have experienced themselves in the "second" or "spiritual" body no longer question the existence of an afterlife—they have experienced being alive and conscious outside the physical body and thus *know* they have some kind of soul that will transcend bodily death. Certainly the subjects of Moody's investigation felt this way, regardless of their religious beliefs prior to their near-death experiences. I presume that this accounts for Elisabeth's own deep conviction that "there is life after death beyond the shadow of a doubt." Her favorite metaphor for death now is that of the butterfly leaving its cocoon, and it is through her own experience that she has come to see birth and death as not so different from one another. As we were on our way to the afternoon lecture, she mentioned that she had undergone age-regression hypnosis and reexperienced her own birth (she was the oldest of triplets and weighed only two pounds). She found the experience of traveling from her mother's uterus and down the vagina toward light and a waiting hand remarkably similar to the "dark tunnel" experiences of her dead-and-revived patients.